

House Finance Committee
Chairman Abney
State House
Providence, RI

In Support of H-6122 (Section 5 of Article 13 of the Governor's budget) regarding changes to the RI Works law.

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for your consideration of the proposed improvements to the RI Works Program through H-6122. NASW-RI Chapter is in strong support of the three changes to the RI Works program proposed in H-6122 (Section 5 of Article 13 in the Governor's budget). We commend Governor McKee for his efforts to support Rhode Island families that are experiencing severe poverty and income deprivation.

The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program allows each state the flexibility to design its own assistance program to meet the needs of low income families while providing them with a path to economic self-sufficiency. The RI Works Program has been essential to supporting Rhode Island families experiencing poverty due to individual circumstances as well as economic downturns.

H-6122 seeks to address gaps in the way in which the program currently functions in order to better support the ability of families to become self-sufficient. Social workers interact with many of these families and witness the hardships that make it difficult to obtain basic necessities. H-6122 will allow families six months before the income of a newly employed adult family member is included as part of the calculation of the household's total family income (or until the household's total gross income exceeds 185 percent of the federal poverty level). This provides a cushion of support to help them to better prepare themselves to live without the benefit.

In addition, H-6122 makes two small, but critical, changes regarding family access to resources. First, the program currently disqualifies, as dependents, youth who turn 18 while still in high school. This results in a drop in family assistance payments when a child turns 18, even though the youth is still being supported by the family. Allowing 18 year olds to remain dependents during their final year of high school will stabilize family income while also encouraging graduation from high school. Also, H-6122 would correct current law which excludes children under four from the annual \$100 clothing allowance afforded to each school age child in the family.

Every day, social workers in both public and private organizations provide support and resources to low income Rhode Islanders who want, like everyone else, to obtain a job that will bring financial stability to their family. H-6122 will provide these families with more opportunities to become self-sufficient. For this reason we are in strong support of H-6122 and urge favorable passage of the bill as soon as possible. If you have any questions or would like to follow up further, we would be glad to talk with you more.

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Sincerely,

NASW-RI Policy and Advocacy Committee

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebekah Gewirtz".

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angie Almeida".

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